

University of Chicago

SCOTT LUCAS

The 14th Annual Middle East History and Theory Conference held at the University of Chicago from 10-11 April 1999, was both an educational and enjoyable event for all those involved. Twenty graduate students and professors from thirteen different American universities presented papers in seven panels, which took place over a two-day period. Five of these papers covered issues concerning Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, such as vulnerability management, state and identity formation, and the decolonization of national discourse. One panel explored how Palestine was used by other na-

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tional movements as a tool for the achievement of political legitimacy, while another panel stimulated discussions about the dramatic rise in international stature of Iranian art films as well as the possibilities inherent in the study of the vernacular architecture of Gecekondü neighbourhoods in modern Istanbul. The remaining papers were related to the interpretation of pre-modern/early-modern classical Islamic texts and mod-

ern socio-political issues in Jordan, Algeria, and Egypt.

The keynote address was delivered by Professor John L. Esposito and consisted in a critique of the dominant 'secular fundamentalist' attitude of the Western academia, which refuses to study Islam and Muslim society as a dynamic religious phenomenon and, thus, finds itself issuing wildly inaccurate explanations of modern Muslim soci-

eties, as well as serious underestimations of the political power which revivalist Islamic groups wield. The conference closed with its annual lamb roast, which was satiating for participants and attendees alike. ♦

*Scott Lucas, Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, University of Chicago, USA.
E-mail: slucas@midway.uchicago.edu*